Assessing the Teachings of Samā'ullāh (Jamshid Maʿānī)

Jamshid Maʿānī with disciples (circa 1970s)

Someone recently sent me two of the English writings of Jamshīd Maʿānī: his rather short *Kitāb-i-Insān* (the Book of the Human) and then his Universal Palace of Order. Here I will provide my impressions. But before I go further: there is now confirmation that Maʿānī died in Iran sometime between late 2009 and early/mid 2010. So my 2009

correspondent was largely correct that Maʿānī had passed away when I attempted to send him a copy of my Greatest Name commentary at that time.

Now, what I have read so far of Jamshid Maʿānī's teachings is fascinating precisely because they sit at a strange crossroads between late Bahāʾī universalism, perennialist humanism (in a Huxleyian sense), quasi-mystical cosmology, and an almost technocratic-utopian sociology. They read like a synthesis of devotional metaphysics and administrative futurism. One constantly feels the residue of Bahāʾī vocabulary and aspirations, but refracted through an idiosyncratic, schismatic, and much more radically universalist lens. It is, in short, an iteration of New Age thinking.

The most striking thing is that Maʿānī's metaphysics are not really Abrahamic in the conventional sense. They are closer to a kind of **cosmic monism** or p**anentheistic metaphysical vitalism**. "The soul of the universe" is described as omnipresent, boundless, beyond names and attributes, the source of all perfection and beauty. This is not the sharply personal God of orthodox Islam, Christianity, or even normative Bahāʾī theology. It is much closer to a universal metaphysical principle clothed in devotional language. One hears echoes of Ibn ʿArabī stripped of technical rigor, mixed with Theosophy, spiritual humanism, and perhaps even post-war Asian universalist discourse. Yet unlike strict monism, he still preserves a transcendental reserve: the Divine remains forever unknowable and concealed. That tension between immanence and ineffability runs throughout the texts I have seen.

His anthropology revolves entirely around the figure of the "perfect human" *(insān kāmil*), though in a flattened and democratized form. In Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) or al-Jīlī (d. 1424), the Perfect Human is a supreme metaphysical locus. In Maʿānī, however, it becomes a universal ethical vocation. Every human being is called toward perfection through moral cultivation, compassion, justice, beauty, and refinement. The result is a kind of ethicalized mystical humanism. He universalizes prophecy itself into a pedagogy of human perfection: all prophets, sages, and enlightened beings teach fundamentally the same truths. That is classic perennialism, but rendered in an accessible populist register.

There is also a very strong dualism operating in the psychology of the human being: one principle tends toward perfection and the other toward lust, deficiency, and degradation. Yet unlike strict ascetic traditions, he does not advocate annihilation of desire so much as balance, governance, and harmonization. The imagery of **Adam and Eve** as symbolic principles rather than literal historical figures is especially revealing. Adam symbolizes perfected humanity while Eve symbolizes deficiency or temptation. This is philosophically interesting but also problematic because it reproduces an old symbolic gender hierarchy common to many esoteric traditions (like the Nuṣayrīs, for example). Still, he treats the story allegorically rather than juridically or historically. In another post, I will compare his notion of Eve to the one I elaborate on in the first chapter of my Effulgences of Wisdom.

One of the interesting dimensions of the writings is the relentless insistence on racial unity and the overcoming of ethnic prejudice. Here Maʿānī is operating squarely within

the universalist anti-racial discourse that emerged strongly in both Bahāʾī circles and broader twentieth-century cosmopolitan thought after colonialism and world war. The metaphor of humanity as flowers of many colors in one garden is unmistakably Bahāʾī in resonance, yet he pushes it further into an ontological claim: color belongs only to the surface, while the human essence is fundamentally one and "colorless." There is a genuine ethical beauty in this vision, even if its language sometimes slips into essentialist simplifications.

Universal Palace of Order

The "Universal Palace of Order" text is perhaps the most unusual element. It reveals Maʿānī not merely as a mystic or preacher but as a visionary system-builder. Contrary to the Bahāʾīs, instead of advocating a centralized world-state, he imagines a transnational civilizational order governed by knowledge and coordinated through "International Houses" (an idea in seed he gets from Bahāʾuʾllāh) representing every field of expertise. This resembles a strange hybrid of Bahāʾī administrative order, technocratic internationalism, UN-style functionalism, and spiritual meritocracy. The key distinction is crucial: he explicitly rejects both political imperial world government and sectarian religious domination. Instead, he proposes coordination through knowledge itself.

That is actually philosophically sophisticated in one respect. Maʿānī understands that durable planetary unity cannot emerge merely through coercive political centralization. Hence his emphasis on distributed sovereignty, cultural autonomy, and transnational coordination through expertise. In some ways, he anticipates later discussions of network governance and civilizational pluralism. Yet the system also carries deeply utopian assumptions: that "knowledge" can exist above ideology, that experts will naturally converge toward justice, and that institutional coordination alone can overcome power struggles, nationalism, capital, militarism, and civilizational conflict. Those assumptions all now appear historically naïve.

Stylistically, the writings oscillate between prophetic proclamation and pedagogical simplification. One constantly senses that Maʿānī deliberately wanted accessibility. The repeated formulas—"Insān decreed…"or "O son of man…"—imitate scriptural cadence. There are unmistakable echoes of Bahāʾuʾllāh's Hidden Words, Christian sermon rhetoric, Qurʾānic moral exhortation, and even modern self-help universalism. But unlike highly sophisticated metaphysical systems, Maʿānīʾs prose tends to collapse distinctions rather than refine them. He speaks in broad luminous abstractions: perfection, beauty, humanity, unity, goodness, knowledge. The effect can be inspiring, but philosophically diffuse. Theologically, he seems to have displaced salvation from revelation to anthropological perfection itself. The "heaven of perfection" is less an afterlife than a state of realized humanity. Evil becomes deficiency rather than rebellion (which is extremely Neoplatonic and Avicennan); prophecy becomes education; religion becomes ethical universalism. This is why the entire corpus feels post-sectarian. It is almost like a religion of secular humanism clothed in prophetic vocabulary.

At the same time, one should not underestimate the originality here. Many schismatics merely repeat inherited formulas. Maʿānī appears to have genuinely attempted to rethink universal order, race, governance, migration, and spiritual anthropology within a single symbolic architecture. The section on "Trans-Immigration," for example, is astonishingly modern in its concern for overcrowding, migration rights, and global inequity. It reads uncannily contemporary despite likely being written decades ago.

Samā'ullāh's Liberal Post-Bahā'ī universalism

Overall, while reading his stuff, I would characterize Jamshid Maʿānī as a post-Bahā'ī universalist visionary, a mystical humanist, a spiritual cosmopolitan, a utopian theorist of knowledge-order, and an esoteric moral reformer. But he completely lacks the metaphysical rigor of the great Islamic philosophers or the symbolic density of the Bāb (d. 1850) and Ibn ʿArabī who I identify with. Yet he possesses something else: an almost messianic sincerity directed toward planetary reconciliation and anthropological perfection. That combination makes the writings historically and intellectually significant, even where they are philosophically uneven or idealistically overstretched. At heart Maʿānī is, what may be called, a sort of utopian cosmopolitan liberal.

So it would be more accurate to say that Jamshid Maʿānī appears to radicalize and dissolve Bahā'ī universalism into a fully post-sectarian spiritual humanism. The Bahā'ī substrate is unmistakably present: unity of humanity, racial reconciliation, universal peace, harmonization of science and religion, world coordination, international institutions, progressive revelation, the "perfect human" as civilizational educator, humanity as one family, the metaphor of the world as a garden of many-colored flowers, and the rhetoric of a coming global order. But Maʿānī simultaneously departs from Bahā'ism in several decisive ways. First, he appears to de-institutionalize revelation itself. In normative Bahā'ism, the Manifestation of God remains central, unique, and historically ordered through covenantal succession and administration. Maʿānī instead diffuses authority into "knowledge," "human perfection," and universal ethical consciousness. The result is that revelation becomes anthropological rather than covenantal. Second, his metaphysics drift away from Bahā'ī theism toward something much more cosmic and impersonal. The "soul of the universe" language is far closer to perennialist monism or mystical cosmology than to Bahā'u'llāh's more restrained transcendental monotheism. God in Maʿānī is increasingly an all-pervasive metaphysical field or absolute consciousness (sans substance-language, here Maʿānī sounds almost Spinozan). Third, his "Universal Palace of Order" differs fundamentally from the Bahā'ī Administrative Order. Bahā'ism ultimately culminates in a spiritually guided global commonwealth under Bahā'ī institutions. Maʿānī explicitly rejects centralized world government and instead imagines a decentralized technocratic network of knowledge-assemblies. In other words, the sacred center shifts from revelation to expertise. This is where the "New Age" aspect genuinely emerges. The system increasingly resembles perennialism (in its Aldous Huxley trajectory), global consciousness spirituality, technocratic humanism, universal ethics, mystical cosmopolitanism, and quasi-Theosophical planetary evolution. The prophetic register remains, but the structure

underneath becomes closer to twentieth-century spiritual internationalism than classical Abrahamic religion.

One could even say Bahāʾism still preserves an apocalyptic-prophetic skeleton beneath its universalism, whereas Maʿānī dissolves the skeleton itself into a religion of human unity and perfection. This is why his writings often feel simultaneously scriptural and strangely modern. They sound like revelation, but function psychologically more like a universal ethical manifesto for planetary civilization. There is also something historically revealing here. Many post-Bahāʾī schismatics went in one of two directions either hyper-sectarian messianism, or total universalist dissolution. Maʿānī belongs to the second category. He universalizes the Bahāʾī impulse until it almost ceases to be recognizably Bahāʾī at all.

Ironically, that may explain why institutional Bahāʾīs reportedly reacted so harshly to him. From the standpoint of covenantal Bahāʾism, this kind of universalization is not an extension of the their creed but a liquidation of its theological core. It is probably more accurate to say that Maʿānī's writings reflect a twentieth-century globalized intellectual atmosphere in which Western modernity, post-war internationalism, Asian spiritual universalism, Bahāʾī ecumenism, and technocratic futurism had already begun to intermingle. The fingerprints are everywhere. The "Universal Palace of Order" thus reads less like classical Islamic *siyāsa* or even Bahāʾī covenantal governance and more like a spiritually sacralized version of post-1945 international institutionalism. One hears echoes of the League of Nations, the United Nations, UNESCO-style global coordination, scientific congresses, technocratic administration, and liberal-humanitarian universalism. The very idea that humanity's problems can be solved through transnational expert bodies coordinating "knowledge" is profoundly modern. Classical Islamic cosmology would ground order in revelation, sacred law, metaphysical hierarchy, or the realized saint. Maʿānī instead grounds it in organized scientific and ethical coordination. That move is unmistakably modernist. Even the anthropology is modernized. In older Islamic metaphysics, the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is a supreme ontological reality tied to the Muhammadan Reality. In Maʿānī, it becomes democratized into a universal moral project of self-improvement, tolerance, racial harmony, and ethical refinement. That shift mirrors twentieth-century humanistic psychology and global ethics discourse as much as it does Sufism.

Likewise, his treatment of race is deeply shaped by post-war universal human rights consciousness. The flower-garden imagery already existed in Bahāʾī literature, but Maʿānī universalizes it into a metaphysical anti-racial doctrine in ways very characteristic of the era after fascism, colonial collapse, and civil-rights discourse. And perhaps most revealingly, his language of "humanity," "progress," "world order," "knowledge," and "perfection" is not rooted in the symbolic density of premodern Islamic discourse. It is abstract, universalized, and civilizational. That is the language of modernity. But—and this is important—it is not merely Westernization. It is Western modernity filtered through: Bahāʾī universalism, Persianate messianic culture, perennialist metaphysics, quasi-esoteric symbolism, and postcolonial aspirations for planetary reconciliation. So what emerges is not simply a Westernized Bahāʾism, but a hybrid global spirituality

characteristic of the twentieth century itself. In that sense, Maʿānī is actually very representative of a broader phenomenon:
religious universalism after the collapse of traditional civilizational boundaries. The old tightly bounded metaphysical worlds had begun dissolving under mass communications, world war, migration, international institutions, anti-racial discourse, global science, and comparative religion. Maʿānī's system is one attempt to spiritually organize that new planetary consciousness.

A Guénonion assessment

From my standpoint—especially given my reverse-hylomorphic and Akbarian-Bayānī sensibilities—one can immediately see the tension. Samā'ullāh's system largely evacuates the dense symbolic ontologies, hierarchies of manifestation, initiatic ruptures, and apocalyptic intensities that animate the Bayān, Ibn ʿArabī, or Suhrawardī (d. 1191). Everything becomes flattened into universal ethical-humanistic language. The metaphysical fire cools into civilizational administration. From a Guénonian perspective, Maʿānī's project would almost certainly be interpreted as belonging to the late modern "counter-traditional" or at least profoundly anti-traditional current, even if clothed in sacred and universalist language. Not because it is evil in intention. Quite the contrary: Maʿānī is clearly animated by ethical sincerity, human unity, compassion, and reconciliation. But for Guénon, sincerity is irrelevant to the deeper metaphysical diagnosis. The decisive issue would be whether a doctrine preserves a living supra-human transmission rooted in principial metaphysics and authentic initiatic continuity—or whether it dissolves these into modern humanitarian abstractions. And Maʿānī repeatedly does the latter.

From René Guénon's (d. 1951) lens, several things would immediately appear symptomatic: the replacement of metaphysical hierarchy with egalitarian humanism, the displacement of revelation by "knowledge" in the modern secular sense, the elevation of scientific congresses and technocratic administration, the abstraction of humanity into a universal moral collective, the reduction of esoteric realization into ethical self-improvement, and the ideal of planetary organization through rational coordination. For Guénon, these are not restorations of Tradition but signs of its inversion under modernity. Bahāʾism is already an anti-traditional fall and compromise with Western globalist modernist inversions. Maʿānī appears to compound these.

Most critically, Maʿānī's "Universal Palace of Order" would strike Guénon as quintessentially modern despite its spiritual rhetoric. Why? Because it places salvific authority in administrative coordination and collective expertise rather than in a transcendent sacred center. The sacred becomes bureaucratized and humanitarianized. This was already a problem with the Kitāb-i-Aqdas's own bureaucratized humanitarianism in its introduction of the concept of the *house of justice* (*bayt al-ʿadl*) (a notion originally ripped off by Bahāʾu'llāh from Ṣubḥ-i-Azal regarding the function of the witnesses of the Bayān and then dumbed down).

Guénon repeatedly warned that modernity often preserves religious vocabulary while evacuating metaphysical content. That is exactly the kind of thing he would likely perceive here: a spiritualized humanitarian universalism functioning as a surrogate religion for planetary modernity. Even the anti-racial universalism—morally admirable as it is—would, in Guénon's framework, still belong to the modern leveling impulse that dissolves qualitative distinctions into quantitative humanity. The symbol of the "many-colored flowers" becomes less an initiatic cosmology than a sentimentalized anthropology. And perhaps most importantly, Guénon would probably see Maʿānī as confusing the psychic with the spiritual. The language of love, universal brotherhood, global harmony, humanitarian sentiment, collective peace, and planetary consciousness would, for Guénon, often indicate the reign of psychic collectivization rather than genuine metaphysical transcendence. In *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, this is precisely the kind of pseudo-spiritual universalism he associates with the terminal phase of modernity: the collapse of formal religion into vague spiritual humanism and global syncretism.

Yet there is an irony here. Maʿānī still preserves fragments of genuinely traditional metaphysical intuition: the unknowability of the Absolute, the symbolic reading of sacred narratives, the hierarchy of perfection, the centrality of the Perfect Human, and the idea that the visible world reflects deeper realities. So he is not merely secular. Rather, he inhabits that intermediate twentieth-century zone where traditional metaphysical remnants become absorbed into modern global consciousness. In other words, the New Age. That is why his writings feel neither fully traditional nor fully secular. They belong to what Guénon would probably call a transitional or confused spiritual atmosphere: a desacralized sacrality. It seems that Maʿānī's project was trying to save universality after the collapse of traditional forms under modernity—but it does so by translating metaphysics into planetary ethics and administration. From a Guénonian perspective, that translation itself would already signal the victory of modernist dissolution over Tradition.

An Akbarian assessment

Ibn ʿArabī's assessment would be far subtler—and far less binary— than Guénon's. Where Guénon tends to divide sharply between authentic Tradition and counter-tradition, Ibn ʿArabī would likely ask a deeper ontological question: *from which divine Name is this phenomenon proceeding, and at what level of manifestation is it operating?* From that perspective, he would probably recognize in Maʿānī's teachings both genuine illuminations of certain divine realities, and profound limitations, reductions, and confusions. He would not dismiss the whole thing outright.

Ibn ʿArabī would almost certainly affirm aspects of Maʿānī's universalism because the Shaykh al-Akbar himself possesses one of the most expansive metaphysical visions of humanity in the Islamic tradition. The idea that humanity is fundamentally one, that divine wisdom manifests in multiple forms, and that love and mercy underlie existence—these are deeply Akbarian themes. Maʿānī's insistence that all prophets emerge from one source and guide humanity toward perfection would not scandalize Ibn ʿArabī in itself.

Likewise, the symbolic interpretation of Adam and Eve, the emphasis on the Perfect Human, and the notion that the visible world mirrors metaphysical realities would all be recognizable to him.

But Ibn ʿArabī would also see immediately where the doctrine becomes flattened. For Ibn ʿArabī, the *Insān al-Kāmil* is not merely an ethically refined humanitarian subject. The Perfect Human is the total mirror of the Divine Names, the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the Absolute and creation, the locus through which existence itself becomes self-disclosed. Maʿānī moralizes and collectivizes this station into a universal ethical ideal. In doing so, he drastically reduces its ontological depth. This would be a critical distinction. Ibn ʿArabī would likely say that Maʿānī perceives reflections of truths but predominantly on the level of moral imagination, psychic aspiration, and collective ideality, rather than on the level of realized metaphysical unveiling (*kashf*).

The "Universal Palace of Order" would especially interest him. Ibn ʿArabī would probably understand it symbolically as an outward shadow of a deeper cosmic order. After all, existence itself is hierarchically organized through the Divine Names, the *awliyāʾ*, the *Quṭb*, the *abdāl*, and the invisible governance of the cosmos. But he would also see that Maʿānī externalizes this metaphysical hierarchy into sociological administration. That is crucial. For Ibn ʿArabī, true order descends from ontological realization. Outer harmony flows from inner realization of *tawḥīd*. But Maʿānī often seems to reverse the process: he hopes planetary coordination and universal ethics will generate unity. Ibn ʿArabī would likely regard that as operating largely on the plane of forms (*ṣuwar*) rather than essences/realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*). He would probably also detect an overextension of the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* at the expense of other Names. Maʿānī's universe is overwhelmingly governed by mercy, harmony, inclusion, unity, beauty, and reconciliation.

But Ibn ʿArabī's cosmos is far more terrifyingly complete. The Divine manifests not only through mercy and beauty (*jamāl*), but also majesty (*jalāl*), rigor, contraction, bewilderment, rupture, wrath, concealment, and paradox. Maʿānī's vision risks becoming spiritually one-sided—almost as though he wishes to eliminate metaphysical tension itself. And Ibn ʿArabī never eliminates tension. Multiplicity, conflict, differentiation, and contradiction are woven into the very fabric of *tajallī*. He would likely appreciate Maʿānī's aspiration toward universal compassion while simultaneously seeing in it a kind of metaphysical simplification: a reduction of the inexhaustible divine self-disclosures into a humanitarian ideal. Most importantly, Ibn ʿArabī would probably distinguish between: *unity as ontological reality*, and *unity as ideological program*. For Ibn ʿArabī, unity already *is*. The Real manifests all forms perpetually. The perfected knower perceives this unity amidst multiplicity. But attempts to impose conceptual or civilizational unity externally can themselves become veils if they remain confined to mental constructions—precisely where Bahāʾu'llāh also fails. This is where the difference becomes decisive.

Maʿānī's project is fundamentally historical and civilizational. The Akbarian vision is ontological and theophanic. One tries to organize humanity. The other unveils the structure of Being itself. So Ibn ʿArabī would probably neither condemn nor endorse Maʿānī outright. Rather, he would see him as someone touched by partial illuminations of

universality, but whose doctrine remains predominantly situated within the imaginative-ethical plane rather than the highest station of realized metaphysical gnosis.

Conclusion

Jamshid Maʿānīʾs teachings represent a striking twentieth-century transformation of Bahāʾī-style universalism into a fully globalized spiritual humanism. The writings preserve unmistakable residues of Bahāʾī discourse—unity of humanity, harmony of science and religion, racial reconciliation, world order, and progressive ethical civilization—yet simultaneously dissolve the covenantal, prophetic, and specifically theological core of Bahāʾism into a far broader post-sectarian cosmology. What emerges from it is not simply a schismatic Bahāʾī sect, but an attempt at constructing a planetary spirituality adequate to the psychological and political conditions of modernity itself.

Its metaphysical structure is fundamentally modern. Although clothed in scriptural cadence and mystical symbolism, the system relocates salvific authority away from revelation and sacred hierarchy toward "knowledge," ethical refinement, humanitarian universalism, and transnational coordination. The "Universal Palace of Order" especially reveals this shift: instead of a sacred polity grounded in divine law or initiatic hierarchy, Maʿānī imagines a decentralized technocratic civilization administered through international bodies of expertise. In this sense, the project belongs unmistakably to the twentieth-century atmosphere of post-war internationalism, scientific optimism, anti-racial universalism, and spiritual cosmopolitanism.

But from a Guénonian perspective, this would almost certainly appear as a symptom of counter-tradition or at least the terminal dissolution of authentic metaphysical forms into humanitarian abstraction. The doctrine universalizes and moralizes truths that, within traditional metaphysics, belong to initiatic realization and ontological hierarchy. The sacred becomes psychologized, collectivized, and bureaucratized. Revelation is replaced by planetary ethics; metaphysics cools into administration; the Perfect Human becomes an ethical ideal of global citizenship rather than the supreme locus of divine manifestation. In Guénon's terms, this is precisely the kind of pseudo-spiritual universalism characteristic of the late modern "Reign of Quantity."

Yet Ibn ʿArabī would likely see the matter more subtly. He would recognize within Maʿānī genuine intuitions of unity, mercy, symbolic anthropology, and the universality of divine self-disclosure. But he would also perceive a flattening of metaphysical depth into the imaginative and ethical plane. Maʿānī apprehends reflections of truths without fully preserving their ontological intensity. His vision externalizes cosmic order into sociological coordination and transforms the metaphysics of the Perfect Human into a generalized humanitarian anthropology. The result is spiritually luminous in aspiration yet metaphysically simplified. Unity becomes less an unveiled structure of Being than a civilizational program to be achieved historically.

Ultimately, Maʿānīʾs writings stand as a revealing document of a broader civilizational transition: the attempt to preserve the language of transcendence after the collapse of

traditional metaphysical worlds under the pressures of global modernity. They belong neither fully to classical esoterism nor to secular rationalism, but to an intermediate zone where remnants of mystical cosmology, prophetic rhetoric, and ethical universalism are reorganized into a planetary spiritual ideology. That is both their originality and their limitation.

In my next post about Samā'ullāh (Jamshid Maʿānī) I will compare what I have seen of his writings thus far to my own.